

Finding Justice

We seem to be passing through a particularly tough time in the world, and learning some hard lessons about ourselves in the process.

Can A Man Be Happy In Iraq?

The enthusiasm of that Texas country-boy, Mr George W Bush, to employ his glittering hardware against tyranny may have taken a bit of a knock, as the “Mission Accomplished” banner is cut up for more fresh bandages. I recall some hard-faced chap being asked as the war began what America hoped to establish in Iraq. “A modern liberal democracy,” came the confident answer. I thought of all those acres of sand and the Arab headgear among the rifles and oil-wells, and wondered what dream-country *he* lived in. Is he still as confident today?

Basin Street Blues

Meanwhile, the deep South is still stunned with the fragility of its sea-wall, and the ease with which a seasonal storm can lay bare the ills of a whole society. “Where all the dark and the light folks meet”, “New Orleans, ma land of dreams”, looks like an ugly lesion that threatens the complacency of a whole nation. That effortless assumption that “we can fix ourselves” has taken a severe beating.

Who Wants Kashmir Now?

The endless struggle for possession of Kashmir between Pakistan and India has also changed its nature overnight. As the death-toll of the earthquake continues to spread into the unvisited tracts of the north, people who were so keenly rattling sabres over it fall silent, and realise that to possess a country is to take responsibility for its grief and vulnerability, not just its resources and powers. Will anyone take our country, and heal it? Does anyone want all this agony, poverty, and disaster?

There'll Be Blue Birds Over

- “but watch out if they're sneezing, and we all start wheezing, tomorrow, just you wait and see”. The parish priest has been snuffling and barking all week, hoping to build up

some immunities in time for the real winter: and that gives him a thought about all the other woes of the world, and the need to respond in some positive way.

Acquiring Immunity

We've just kept Family Fast Day, and we have sent our little annual gift to the People First charity in Bihar; that sort of response - doing a bit of good, letting ourselves bleed a bit where many perish - might introduce a kind of immune foothold in us. The world's full of people bemoaning and bewailing its dangerous nature, so often inhuman and contrary. For so many in this fortress island, which seldom quakes or floods, never erupts, and is well-buttressed against famine of any kind, we have the freedom to look out with a sort of critical distaste: why do people live in such places, we ask; why are they so improvident, why don't they get their act together as we have? Well - perhaps our good fortune, assisted by our long-established self-interest and our imperial dominion of them, has hardly favoured their ability to rise over their problems and flourish. It ill becomes us now, if we draw back our skirts and look down on them. The only hope for justice is a new community between all the peoples of the earth: the one we glimpse when the helicopters arrive, and the aid gets through, and the little child is hoisted from the wreckage after four days' entombment, amid scenes of wild joy in which we can all share.

Acquiring Humanity

Humanity isn't always much fun - not when affliction takes hold, and we shiver and lose our confidence. But to be human is our hope for God's mercy and love. He will be God for us, when we agree to be the People of God for him. He doesn't promise that we will be glorious Apollo and Diana from our births, with silver spoons and fairy godmothers. He promises that if we lay down our poor lives in love, we shall inherit forgiveness, and healing, and the grace to be made divine; and we can catch sight of this unearthly plan,

when the earth quakes, and our house falls,
and compassion is born. *Fr Philip*